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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

4 January 1957

STAFF MEMO No. 3-57

SUBJECT: Possibility of Soviet Withdrawal from Eastern Europe

1. Has the USSR become more willing to consider seriously the withdrawal of its troops from the Satellites? This question is raised not only by recent events in that area but also by one paragraph in Moscow's omnibus disarmament proposal of 17 November. As Soviet officials have taken pains to point out to the US, the old formula of mutual withdrawal from "Germany and adjacent states" is here replaced by a reduction of foreign garrisons in the NATO and Warsaw Pact states.

Soviet Interests in Control of Eastern Europe

2. The presence of Soviet troops is the ultimate basis of the Communist governments in the Satellites. The existence of these governments has enabled Soviet propaganda to build the myth of the growing "socialist camp" and thus to lend substance to the argument of socialism's triumphant expansion throughout the world. These regimes also augment the economic resources of the USSR. But their chief importance is probably military: The Satellites provide a buffer zone against the hostile West, an advance base for military operations, and forward positions for the early warning system. Satellite armies have also been viewed as augmenting Soviet troop strength, or at least as reducing the strength of enemy forces.

3. The occupation of East Germany serves the additional purpose of keeping that country divided. This physical division, plus the restraints laid upon West Germany by the necessity to deal with the USSR concerning reunification, inhibit the growth of a potential great power rival in Central Europe.

Possible Changes in the Soviet Estimate

4. Soviet control of the Satellites was established in 1944-45 on the basis of military-strategic assumptions which may no longer have the same validity. For some time following the Second World War, the deployment

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of large ground forces in Eastern Europe not only provided the USSR with a defense in depth, but the capability of these forces quickly to overrun Western Europe served psychologically, at least, to counter US supremacy in the field of nuclear delivery capabilities. But the development of nuclear weapons and strategic air capabilities both by the West and the USSR itself has lessened the military value of the forward ground forces. The probable strategic reevaluation described in NIE 11-4-56 suggests that the Soviet leaders may no longer regard the occupation of Eastern Europe as critical to their military security, with the exception that such a reevaluation would attach great importance to the early warning system in the Satellites. At the same time, demonstration of the unreliability, from the Soviet viewpoint, of the Hungarian and Polish forces depreciates the value of Soviet hegemony in the Satellites.

5. While the military assets of occupation are diminishing, the political and economic liabilities are increasing. Recent events must suggest to the Soviet leaders that, if occupation continues, nationalist sentiments cannot be satisfied and will continue to keep Eastern Europe in an unstable and tense state. Under these conditions, they might consider that the Satellite populations will be politically recalcitrant and economically unproductive to an increasing degree. The economic costs of occupation have already risen, and the Satellites may now be a net economic burden to the USSR. The political costs have also increased, and the regime's relations with Yugoslavia, Western Europe, the uncommitted nations, and even elements of the Soviet population, have been prejudiced. The USSR must also reckon with the possibility of further violent eruptions requiring Soviet intervention, which could at some time produce disturbances within the USSR or lead to a new world war.

Conditions for Withdrawal

6. In contemplating troop withdrawal within the next several years, the Soviet leaders would have to anticipate the overthrow of the Satellite regimes and the creation of anti-Communist governments. They might well regard this as a political setback of such major proportions as to exclude their entertaining withdrawal at all. On the other hand, if they did decide to accept such a reverse, they might estimate that the continuing economic dependence of the Eastern European states upon the USSR and the latter's overwhelming military power would produce a spirit of accommodation similar to that of Finland, which refrains from provocative military postures, trades heavily with the USSR, and pursues an inoffensive foreign policy. They would also expect to gain some credit in world opinion, particularly in neutralist circles, from such a move.

7. The Soviet leaders would estimate that withdrawal from East Germany would lead to early reunification through absorption of the GDR

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by West Germany. They would therefore probably insist that withdrawal be linked with guarantees of German neutrality and restrictions upon German armament through bilateral, four-power, European-wide, or UN agreements.

8. Timing would be an all-important factor. The present moment is highly inappropriate because the prestige of the Soviet government, the Communist party, and the Soviet Army are so firmly committed to the present course that troop withdrawals would be taken as an inglorious retreat, with disastrous consequences throughout the Bloc. A propitious circumstance would be one in which a continuation of the present policy carried high political and economic costs but did not confront a direct challenge from below. The optimum condition would occur if, at the same time, the US were willing to offer substantial military concessions in return and NATO members seemed inclined, if encouraged by concrete Soviet actions, to weaken the alliance or to reduce their joint military efforts. The initial Soviet asking price would probably be US withdrawal from all foreign bases, but if the Soviet leaders embarked on this kind of negotiation at all, they would presumably accept some lesser scale of Western concessions, probably in the context of a general security and disarmament agreement.

9. Even under the most favorable circumstances, the Soviet leaders would regard withdrawal as a dangerous step. They would realize that, once evacuated, Eastern Europe could be reoccupied only at a heavy risk of general war and that meanwhile they would be dependent upon treaties alone to prevent the West from revoking its part of the bargain at a later date. They would fear that a friendly, non-expansionist Germany might turn out to be an impossibility under any guarantees. Even if they were able to retain some of the privileges of the Warsaw Pact, such as an early-warning system in Eastern Europe, access and transit rights in case of emergency, and a monopoly in providing military equipment to national armies in the area, they still could not be confident of the permanence of these assets, which would depend upon host governments not subject to their control.

10. We believe, therefore, that from the Soviet viewpoint, the weight of advantage at present continues to be heavily on the side of maintaining their forces in the Satellites. Nevertheless, the liabilities attached to current Soviet policy in Eastern Europe will probably continue to grow, and the Soviet leaders may conclude from their recent experiences that withdrawal should eventually take place. They would almost certainly insist, however, that withdrawal not appear as a retreat before mounting opposition. This would require that the USSR first cope effectively with the present challenge to its position in the Satellites and at least appear to stabilize the situation. We do not believe that these conditions will

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be satisfied in the near future. If, however, over a longer run the USSR rebuilds its prestige in Eastern Europe but remains unable to establish real stability, the chances of a serious Soviet effort to disengage militarily from the area would probably increase.

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